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ABSTRACT

The University of Victoria Maltwood Museum and Art Gallery (British Columbia) recently acquired a collection of 2,000 limited edition silkscreen prints that documents the development of the Aboriginal print medium from the 1950s to the present. Master artists from all six major linguistic and cultural First Nations coastal groups of British Columbia are represented: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, Nuuchah-nulth, and Salish. The collection contains artist biographies and statements, historical photographs, as well as video clips and interviews with artists. To make the collection more accessible, an interactive Internet Web site and CD-ROM were designed to be used by educational institutions and public schools. Many First Nations schools in British Columbia are developing culturally based curricula that make use of electronic technologies to enhance the instructional process. As part of the Web site project, local undergraduate students conducted ethnographic interviews to elicit information about the works from the artists who created them and from knowledgeable elders. The artists and elders identified which aspects of the work were traditional and which were innovative. The idea of a journey provides structure for the Web site and guides visitors from one culture to another. Along the way, travelers are presented with a number of challenges that involve looking closely and attending to various art forms, which often are based on myths and legends. An excerpt from the Web site illustrates how ideas are organized into the journey format. The project will eventually expand to produce a separate CD-ROM for each of the six cultures. The Web site's URL is: http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/nwcp/index.html. (Contains 21 references). (LP)

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ED 438 146

Yet Sun Heywa: Developing A First Nations Art Website

Bill Zuk and Robert Dalton

The development of an interactive computer teaching project, a multicultural learning resource for Internet and CD ROM use, that incorporates a contemporary collection of silkscreen prints from First Nations cultures of the Northwest Coast of British Columbia is described.

"Yet sun heywa" means "we are going somewhere" in the Coast Salish language. This title has been chosen to honour the people who have lived in the lower Vancouver Island region for thousands of years because this is where this project began. The phrase also describes our journey into the Pacific Northwest cultures of British Columbia. A welcoming figure (see Figure 1) inviting everyone to share in the multicultural experience is used to introduce this paper and the stories presented in the website project. This is in keeping with the custom of First Nations people to share stories with others as a way of preserving their strong oral and visual art traditions.

Figure 1 Welcoming Figure

Origins and Aims

The University of Victoria Maltwood Museum and Art Gallery recently acquired a collection of 2 000 limited edition silkscreen (serigraph) prints that document the development of the aboriginal print medium from the 1950's to the present. Master artists from all six major linguistic and cultural First Nations groups in British Columbia's coastal areas are included: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, Nuuchah-nulth, and Salish. The collection is rich in contextual material and contains artist biographies and statements, historical photographs, as well as video clips and interviews with artists.

The acquisition of an important collection of this sort led the Maltwood's Director, Martin Segger, to seek ways to make this resource accessible. Space limitations in the Museum mean that only a small number of prints can be on public display at any time, the rest of the collection must be kept in the vaults. Segger expressed an interest in making more of the collection available to a wider audience than those who would normally visit the Museum. Simply exhibiting the artwork is one way

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of exposing viewers to the formal properties of the work, its design qualities, colour, and composition. However, without the benefit of further explanation, much of the meaning and significance of the prints is not revealed. In order to contextualize the ideas of the collection and make it more accessible, Segger invited us as art educators, to participate in a project that involved developing ideas for universal access on the Internet.

Educational institutions and public schools are becoming increasingly computerized, and they are also involved in using multimedia technologies as a way of making their programs current and more effective. The project aims to combine various forms of visual, sound, and text information through the development of a website and an interactive disk technology system (CD ROM). This project has the potential to make an important contribution to modernizing the delivery of learning. The use of technology that combines images, sound, and text can provide students with opportunities for engaging in interactive learning. As they handle complex information, they can quickly move from one culture to another and analyze or make comparisons while adding depth to the way they conceptualize various new ideas. Many First Nations schools and programs are developing locally based curricula that feature programs of cultural studies that increasingly make use of electronic technologies to enhance the instructional process. This project can become part of this process. A website and CD ROM is the primary means of making available a highly useable form of electronic information to 16 000 public schools across Canada as well as institutions, galleries, and museums across North America and beyond.

A second objective of the project is to promote multicultural learning. Art is an important vehicle for exploring cultural ideas because it documents beliefs and customs. It also contributes to appreciation and respect because it represents some of the finest achievements of societies. An important and frequently overlooked aspect of multicultural education is the notion of change. Cultural aspects are often misrepresented by an emphasis on traditions without acknowledging evolution and adaptation to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary life. This project takes into account both tradition and innovation. It seeks to develop in students a deeper appreciation for the history and distinctiveness of cultures as well as how they change, adapt, and revitalize.

A third objective of the project includes the involvement of a group of students working as a team in the design and development of the program. Six people were hired for the project, some were undergraduate students at the University of Victoria and others were recent high school graduates about to enter post-secondary institutions. Expertise in a variety of important areas was represented: two First Nations students had insight into their cultures and were able to make contact with artists and elders willing to be interviewed; another two students were knowledgeable in computer programming and able to develop technological aspects of the

project; and two were art students with a background in design and illustration. It was hoped that while working with us, the students would be able to make a significant contribution and learn a great deal about researching ideas, working in collaborative situations, and producing multimedia electronic learning resources.

Theoretical Perspectives

This project is based on theories of cultural maintenance in changing societies, position statements about multicultural art education, and research methods concerning ethnographic data collection. The heritage of every society includes a considerable body of beliefs, assumptions, and concepts that define the nature of the world in which its members live, and through which they perceive events that occur around them (Harris, 1963). Traditional Northwest Coast artworks use certain culturally prescribed colour schemes such as red and black, organizational principles such as bilateral symmetry, and shapes such as ovoids. These artworks strictly adhere to clan symbols as they tell of the original beliefs and values of a people. Among the indigenous cultures of the Pacific Northwest Coast, those values would include: respect for elements in Nature and caring towards the Earth and its creatures.

Since the goal of this project was to look at tradition and innovation, it was necessary to define innovation. Tradition in indigenous art may be defined as form and content that remain unchanged over time, but innovation is more difficult to defiine. MacNair, Hoover, and Neary (1987) describe the indigenous innovator as someone who is less restricted in their use of materials and their exploration of subject and form. This may involve combining or substituting more than one material or process, or abbreviating ideas while still applying the intellectual control that characterizes master work from a previous era. Innovation develops through experimentation to an expanded repertoire of ideas. As it departs from well established rules, it seems less predictable. Zuk and Bergland (1992) identify a number of processes for freely altering images to create new, innovative ones. These processes are referred to as image development strategies and include such operations as: elaboration, simplification, distortion, and juxtaposition. These alterations to images enable artists to create artworks that not only "look" new, but also introduce new ideas.

Art objects can provide a valuable starting point for multicultural art education (Stuhr, Petrovich-Mwaniki, and Wasson, 1992). Using the art object as the focus of discussion, students can be given the opportunity to investigate the artist and culture that created it. As they begin to understand the culture, they are able to make comparisons with their own. Ideal multicultural learning expands cultural knowledge, affirms one's own culture, fosters respect for others, and discovers connections.

As part of this website project, students used ethnographic interviews to elicit information about the works from the artists who created them and from knowledgable elders in the community, familiar with the stories and artistic traditions of their cultures. The questions and interview procedures were developed using research practices recommended by Spradley (1979). These procedures enabled the students to gain information that was valid, and accorded the First Nations informants the respect that was their due. While the theorists may have much to say about what constitutes tradition and innovation, the questions posed by the students were framed in a way that invited the artists and elders to determine which aspects of the work were traditional and which were innovative.

Stages of the Project

Initially it was necessary to acquaint ourselves with the collection of prints and any additional information that could contribute to the background data about the artists and their cultures. It was judged to be impractical to create a website that contained all of the available 2 000 prints. The amount of data would be too overwhelming and due to time constraints, would make organization impossible. The challenge was to identify a representative selection for use in the website and CD ROM. Two criteria were applied in the selection: first, we considered it necessary to include each of the six cultures and representative examples of artwork created by artists from each culture; and second, we considered it advisable to choose works from artists who were acknowledged by their communities and by the wider circle of art gallery curators and museum personnel as being master artists with considerable skill and expertise in creating prints. On occasion, a chosen artist was unavailable for an interview, but we were satisfied that those who were asked to comment, were well qualified to speak about the art and culture. As a further step in becoming better acquainted with the cultures represented in the study, the student researchers undertook extensive reading. They also attended First Nations celebrations and performances, and videotaped, photographed, and audiotaped whenever they were given permission to do so.

As the data were collected, it became necessary to develop a structure and framework that would introduce the available information to participants in the website learning experience. The idea of a journey was chosen as a way of having visitors travel from one culture to another. Along the way, travelers are presented with a number of challenges that involve looking closely and attending to a variety of art forms, which often are based on myths and legends. Questions are asked that require application of what is being learned. The intent is to challenge users to look closely, listen carefully, and reflect on the way answers are formulated. Thoughtfully chosen correct responses hasten the completion of the journey.

A Website Excerpt: The Work of Charles Elliott

An excerpt from the website is provided to illustrate how ideas are organized into the journey format. The example also indicates the personal manner of presenting ideas.

You are exploring the Coast Salish region. You fly high above the trees and over a swift flowing river. You decide to land and pass some time beside this beautiful river. While there, you encounter a man seated on a tree stump. He sees you and says, "Hello Raven, my name is Charles Elliott. I am of the Coast Salish people." He confides in you his anguish over the decline of Salish art in recent history. "It had to be awakened and nursed back to health. I'm happy to say I'm one of the people who has dedicated his life to this reawakening."

THE FROG LEGEND: Though very small and peaceful, the frog has an important role to play in Coast Salish myths and legends, even to this day. The frog is the one in the spring of the year who sings to announce the beginning of a new cycle. To the Coast Salish people, the voice of the frogs tells us all to put aside the things of winter such as winter dancing and potlatching in order to begin the new cycle of preparation for next winter's activities. The little frog, though small, has a very important job to do in the yearly cycle, equal in importance with the arrival of Centeki, the first salmon (which is the sockeye) or Pekelanew, the moon which turns the leaves white. The frog is honoured as the keeper of the sacred seasons and is often remembered in our legends and stories, appearing in our artworks, totems, and house posts.

Based on what you have just heard, answer the following question:

What governs the Coast Salish peoples' festivities?

–The tribe leader –Time –Nature

If you selected "the tribe leader" as your answer, add two days to your journey.
Remember what the legend said about "singing."
If you selected "time" as your answer, add two days to your journey.
Time is a natural force of its own; some may argue that it does not control events.
If you selected "nature" as your answer, add only one day to your journey. The seasons are the forces of nature which trigger the singing of the frogs.

To congratulate you on your understanding of the frog legend, Charles Elliott presents you with a print, Salish Renewal. This print was produced for the naming potlatch of an adopted daughter of Nuu-chah-nulth and Salish parents. The singing of frogs indicates the Salish New Year. This image symbolizes the union of two cultures, hence the beginning of a new cycle of future harmony between cultures. The joined mouths of the male and female represent union and creation. The print also represents the revitalization of Salish culture. Charles Elliott explains that this print is an example of how contemporary ideas may be integrated with traditional

Salish design elements. "Raven, here, is an example of how art may change with the times. This is innovation."

Being a curious raven, you must know more. You ask Mr. Elliott to describe traditional Salish design. He responds by saying a main element of Salish style is that we don't give it all away. It's a very subtle art. We keep some of it for ourselves because it can be very personal. The rest is for the eyes of others. Show that you understand what Charles Elliott has told you. Try to identify the Salish print from the three prints shown (see Figures 2, 3, and 4) before you read on.

Figure 2—*Poison and Man*
The first print is Poison Salmon and Man by Tim Paul. Salish design does not fill in all the spaces, it leaves room for the eye to continue the form on its own. If you chose this print, you must spend two days escaping the salmon. Please try again.

Figure 3—*Salish Renewal*
In the second print, notice how the lines around the eyes and mouth are discontinuous. They are crescent shapes which imply line rather than exactly representing line. It is the subtle style of the Salish which Charles Elliott fully employs. This is Salish Renewal. Your choice is correct. You spend one day admiring the print then continue on your journey.

Figure 4—*Swan*
The third print is Swan by Patrick Amos. Salish design includes discontinuous lines. You spend two days admiring the beauty of the swan. Please try again.

Initial Observations and Possible Extension

An evaluation of the program is currently underway. Informal assessments have been made by a variety of audiences including teachers in a Master of Education program at the University of Victoria and members of the First Nations community. Formal testing of the program will take place in Terrace, British Columbia, where First Nations artists and cultural teachers will be asked to assess the program. Administrators in schools with a significant population of Native students will also be interviewed. CD ROMs will be available at that time for those who are currently unable to access the program through internet. The intent is to assess the value of the program and its method of delivery. Finding out how adults and students respond to the information and whether or not they find the interactive computer technology challenging, involving, and enjoyable is also of interest. Criteria will include ease of accessing information, the degree of challenge and difficulty presented in each unit of activity, and the comprehensiveness of cultural informa-

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

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tion in each learning module. For any teachers and students who do not have access to computers, a text version will be made available.

The information that is collected should make it possible to determine whether changes and/or improvements are needed. A final step will involve the further production of CDs with cover designs that make use of images in the print collection. These will be distributed to schools, universities, and museums.

The production of the website and the CD are the first stage of a larger project that we hope will see the production of separate CDs for each of the six cultures, providing a more in-depth examination of the cultures and making greater use of the print collection. As well, it is hoped that the scope of the project will be extended to include the cultural counterparts of nations represented in this project: the Tlingit in Alaska as well as the Makah and Salish in Washington. An advisory group of educators, artists, First Nations representatives, and technicians has been assembled, and sources of funding are being explored to extend the present project.

Initial response to the website has been very favourable. Students involved in the research project have indicated that it has been a valuable learning experience for them. Through involvement in the project they have increased their own understanding and appreciation for the indigenous art of contemporary Northwest Coast Native printmakers in British Columbia. They learned from one another through cooperating as a team to share expertise, set goals, and take responsibility for meeting those goals in the production of a program about which they feel a certain pride. Audiences who have viewed the program have given favorable comments about the work. As the first stage nears completion, more formal evaluation will be conducted and reports will be made to the agencies funding this research. The response to these reports will prove critical in securing further funding to continue the work. The possibilities for greatly extending access to museum collections through interactive computer technology are promising, as are the prospects of involving students as part of a collaborative team of researchers in producing a multicultural curriculum. We have enjoyed the challenges and look ahead to what the promising future might hold.

"Yet Sun Heywa" can be found on the web, its URL is www.maltwood.uvic.ca
We wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions made by student members of this project: Brenda Sam, Omdrea Tickell, Jason George, Debbie Schwartz, Steve Ansell, and Randi Cook.

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